Hope Street Group Kentucky State Teacher Fellows Program
Report on Data Collection II
April 4, 2014

Programmatic Update

To prepare for the second round of data collection, the Kentucky State Teacher Fellows (STFs) led and participated in training focused on establishing Student Growth Goals (SGG), the 2014 General Assembly session, and legislation introduced at the General Assembly to repeal the adoption of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) also known as the Common Core State Standards.

In the report submitted in January 2014, it was noted that STFs had encountered several challenges in terms of teacher attendance at their respective focus groups. This challenge has not been completely ameliorated; however, in response to it, STFs began to work collaboratively with principals and other school and district leaders to include focus groups on the agenda of previously scheduled meetings such as faculty meetings. In addition, Corbin, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Trigg County school districts, undertook efforts to provide teachers who participate in focus groups with professional learning credits that can be used locally to fulfill professional learning requirements. Todd County offered to provide teachers with either professional learning credit for participating in a STF-led focus group *or* a stipend.

Inclimate weather posed a significant challenge to teachers across Kentucky. HSG believes that the overall participation of teachers in STF activities, while on an upward trend, has been negatively impacted by excessive snow days. STFs tried to reschedule many of their cancelled focus groups; however, their success varied. Ultimately, 20 of the 18 STFs were able to hold focus groups.

In January, Hope Street Group staff (HSG) and two Kentucky STFs began the process of analyzing the *depth* of engagement of teachers in the Professional Learning Networks (PLN) for three reasons. One, HSG is interested in knowing how many teachers within PLN are becoming more involved in the myriad of activities designed and hosted by STFs. Second, year two goals for the program are currently being developed. Second year goals for teacher engagement will be more detailed than those for the first year. In the first year, the goal was to engage 10 percent of all Kentucky teachers. In March 2014, HSG exceeded that goal by engaging 19 percent of all teachers in Kentucky. Finally, HSG is committed to transparency in both reporting the number of teachers the STFs engage, how intensively they are engaged, and in the data collection process. HSG views the analysis and reporting of the engagement of teachers as additional level of transparency.

In year two of the program, the goal will be to not only engage more teachers but to engage a larger subset of those teachers. For example, a teacher in a PLN would respond to a survey sent by a STF *and* also write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper in support of an education reform. HSG is still working with Kentucky STFs to refine the descriptions of the varying levels of engagement (see table 1) and the tagging of teacher engagement that will be used to track the depth of engagement; however, preliminary work in this area allows HSG to report that 19.5 percent of teachers are engaged at level one

(an almost 100 percent increase from January 2014), 9.29 percent of teachers are engaged at level two, and 2.98 percent of teachers are engaged at level three. It is important to note the level one engagement of a teacher is necessary to drive deeper engagement of all level one teachers over time. Descriptions of the levels are found below.[1]

Table 1: DRAFT Engagement Levels and Descriptions

Engagement Level	Description
Level One-Reach	Teachers receive an engagement opportunity and increase their familiarity with HSG's program by: receiving an email, tweet, survey, Facebook "friend" request or an invitation from a STF to a focus group.
Level Two-Respond	Teachers receive an engagement opportunity and increase their familiarity with HSG's program by: providing an email address to a STF to join a PLN, requesting more information in response to a STF-generated opportunity, completing a HSG survey, participating in a #KYedchat, tagging a tweet with #HSGKY14, tweet or retweet a HSG STF-generated article, op-ed, survey, or tweet, responding to a HSG STF-generated article or op-ed in the "comments" section, become a follower or "friend" of a STF on twitter, or Facebook, joining HSG's Virtual Engagement Platform (VEP) due to a HSG STF-generated article, blog, email, invitation, survey, tweet or retweet.
Level Three-Reciprocate	Teachers receive an engagement opportunity and increase their familiarity with HSG's program by: actively engaging in VEP topic threads, attending a state or local HSG STF focus group, writing a letter to the editor, opinion editorial, blog in relation to the HSG STF program, initiating, leading, or joining an activity as a result of the HSG STF program.

---

[1] The descriptions of engagement and the corresponding tagging system will be finalized by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. What appears in table 1 is still considered by HSG to be a draft as modest changes might be made in the coming weeks.

Data Collections

Since January 2014, an additional round of data collection has been completed (referred to throughout this report as data collection II). Using recommended questions from the Kentucky Department of Education, with input from other partners such as the Kentucky Education Association (KEA), STFs sent a survey to the teachers in their PLN. The survey was open for two weeks. Survey topics focused on:

- SGG within PGES; and
- Funding priorities for public education.

Data collection II included data from 1,587 teachers from 87 percent of school districts in Kentucky. The districts with the highest number of teachers responding were: *Bullitt, Fayette, Jefferson, Lincoln, McCracken, Oldham, Owensboro,* and *Shelby*. Data collection II did not include any respondents from: *Anderson, Ballard, Boyle, Clay, Clinton, Crittenden, Cumberland, Gallatin, Garrard, Henderson, Hickman, Johnson, Lee, Leslie, Lyon, Magoffin, Mercer, Monroe, Nicholas, Pendleton, Trimble,* and *Washington.*

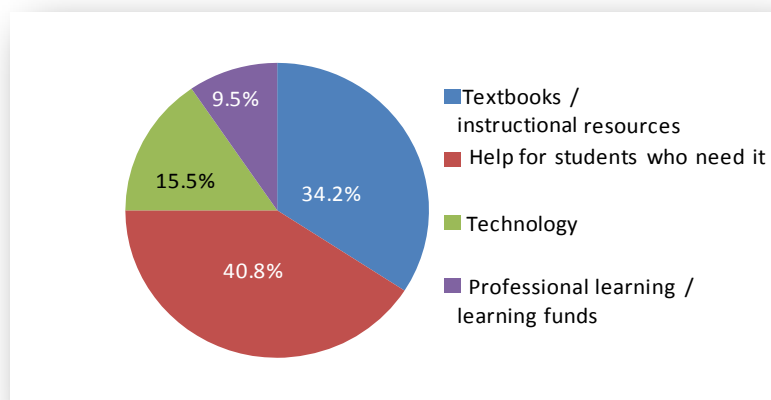Unless noted, each respondent could only pick one response to the questions posed.

Data Report for Funding Priorities for Public Education (survey results)
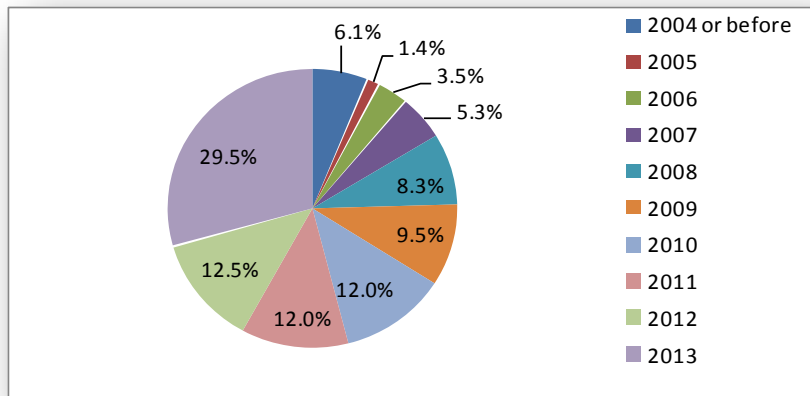
Table 2: Survey Questions and Results

Questions	% of YES responses	% of NO responses
"Do you have access to the professional learning / learning you need to improve your practice?"	66.8%	33.2%
"Do you have the textbooks and other instructional resources you need to teach your students?"	43.3%	56.7%
"Do you have access to the technology (hardware) you need to meet your instructional needs?"	56.8%	43.2%
"Is the Internet bandwidth available at your school adequate to meet instructional demands?"	55.3%	44.7%

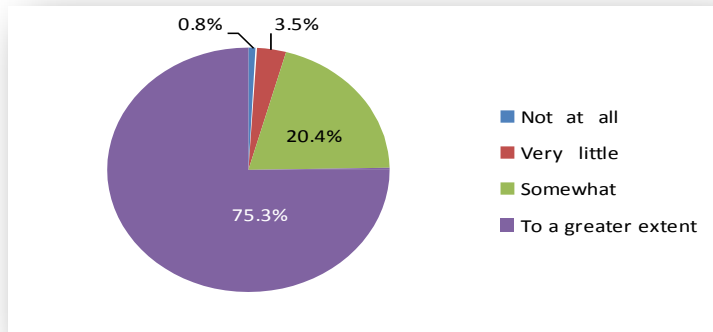**QUESTION: "What are your biggest budget concerns?"**

Lack of …

QUESTION: *"When was the last year you got an increase in pay?"*

■ 2004 or before	
■ 2005	
■ 2006	
■ 2007	
■ 2008	
■ 2009	
■ 2010	
■ 2011	
■ 2012	
■ 2013	

6.1% 1.4% 3.5% 5.3% 8.3% 9.5% 12.0% 12.0% 12.5% 29.5%

QUESTION: "To what extent does educational funding have an impact in your classroom?"

0.8% 3.5% 20.4% 75.3%

■ Not at all
■ Very little
■ Somewhat
■ To a greater extent

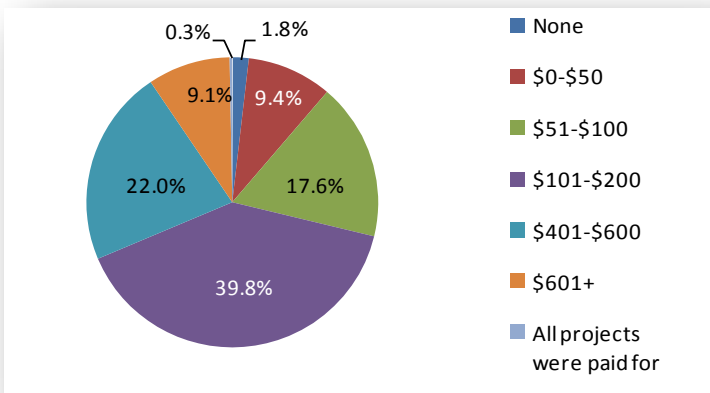**QUESTION: "How much of your own money have you spent to fund classroom projects or to purchase supplies this year?"**

0.3% 1.8% 9.4% 17.6% 9.1% 22.0% 39.8%

■ None
■ $0-$50
■ $51-$100
■ $101-$200
■ $401-$600
■ $601+
■ All projects were paid for

4

Table 3: Additional budget concerns

| Concern	Number of Respondents
Class size/not enough teachers	73
Lack of assistants/aides in class	10
Students who need help	7
Gifted and talented students	13
Special needs/special education students	6
At-risk students	2
ESL students	2
Response to Intervention	2
Low-performing students	1
Other demands that take time from teaching	16
Loss of programs/activities outside of class	6
Stress	3
Salary/payment	28
Retirement funding	13
Imbalance between expectations and rewards	5
Job insecurity	5
Lack of funding (for example, professional development and special teachers)	12
Uncertainty of long-term grant funding	2
Inadequate allocation of money	5
Too much money spend on administration	2
Materials and supplies	21
Instructional resources, textbooks, libraries	20
Adequate technology	11
Time and training to implement technology	5
Instruments	3

QUESTION: "In what ways would you prefer to keep up with Kentucky education news, instructional resources and new initiatives such as the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System?" (select all that apply)
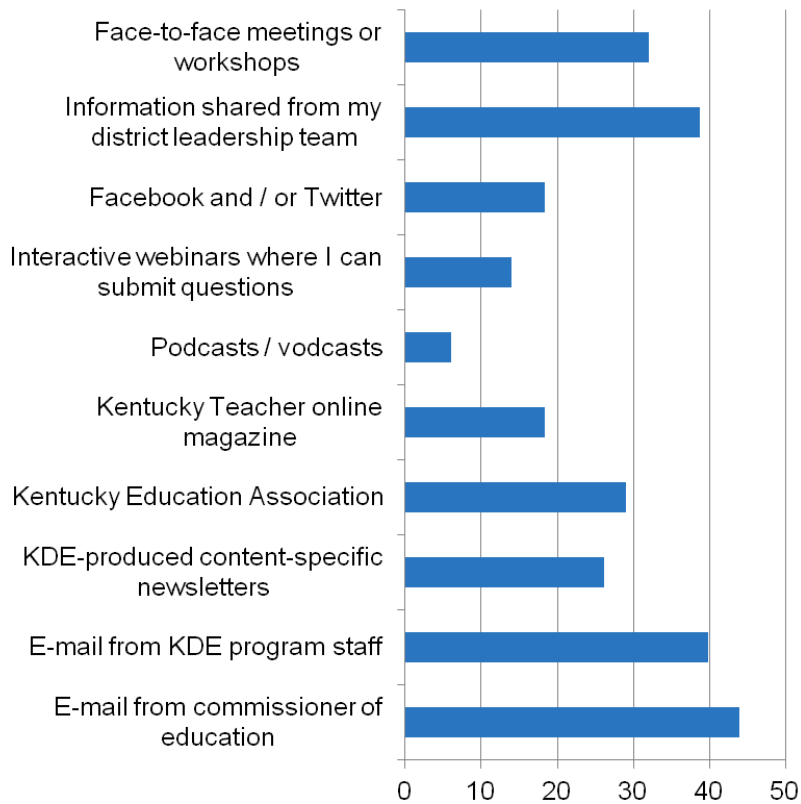
Question: "How do the demands of your job compare with five years ago?"
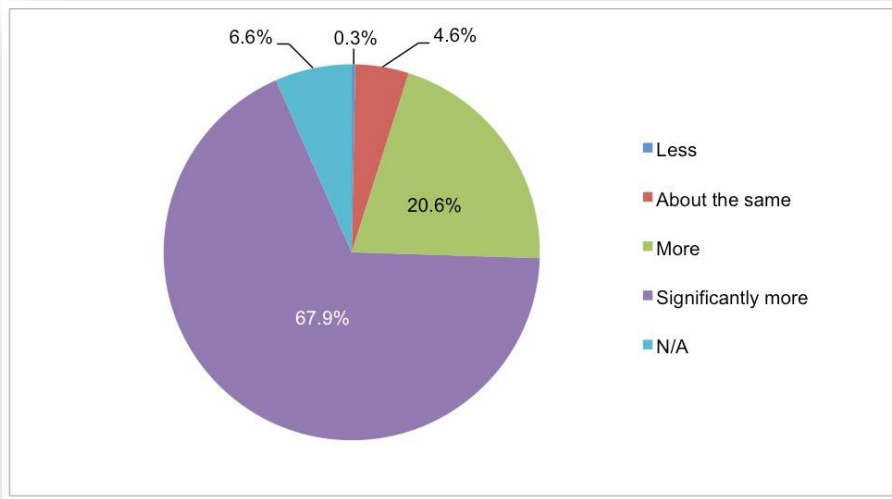
QUESTION: "How frequently do you want to receive updated information?"
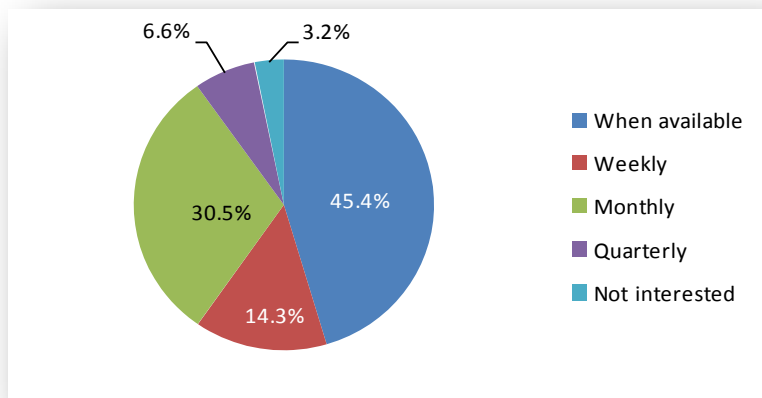
Data Report for Funding Priorities for Public Education (focus groups)

The "Post Focus Group After Action Reports" (completed by the STF who leads the focus group) and the post-focus group questionnaire (completed by the teachers who attend a focus group) data yielded a set of qualitative findings related to respondents' perceptions of the impacts of education funding on teachers and classroom practices. Below, these impacts are discussed and organized around six areas.

1. **Teacher Salaries**
Respondents to the post-focus group questionnaire ranked increasing teacher salaries as the most important place to invest additional education funds.[2] Analyzing both the "Post Focus Group After Action Reports" and the open-ended portions of the post-focus group questionnaire helped to explain in greater detail why teachers believe increasing salaries is the most important place to invest education funds. A majority of teachers noted that increasing teacher salaries was a priority for them, and some mentioned they had not had pay increases in years. Others noted that their salaries had actually been cut. A teacher explained: **"***We have not had a pay increase in years, even though the cost of living continues to rise. Assistants in our building have smaller take home pay than they did 4 years ago. Teachers have not had raises in several years. We are working for less that minimum wage when you figure how much extra time we have to put in. Teachers deserve a raise!"*

Teachers believe higher salaries are necessary to recruit highly qualified teachers. Many teachers believe that districts need to increase salaries to retain and attract high quality teachers. One teacher noted that: *"first and foremost, staff need to be better paid in order to attract the highest quality educators."*

A few teachers added that recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers would have a positive impact on student success.

2. **Professional learning**
Access to high quality professional learning is a major need. Question 6 of the post-focus group questionnaire focused on how teachers' personal professional learning/development has been affected by education funding. **Close to half of respondents (41%, n=176) indicated that they had not been able to attend high quality professional learning due to lack of funding.**

In the qualitative data from the focus groups, many teachers echoed this concern. One teacher explained:
"Teachers are being expected to perform higher, but have virtually no resources for professional learning aside from their own search for PD through blogs, twitter posts, list serves, etc.[…]. If we are going to improve our practice, we need TIME, and money toward providing more PD or the pay to support the extra hours we put into educating ourselves and improving our practice."

Teachers want personalized, accessible, and relevant professional learning. Teachers lamented that, even when districts provided professional learning, these opportunities were not personalized to teachers' individual needs, nor did they allow teachers to look outside their district for training and enrichment. A teacher stated that: "*My requests to attend conferences pertinent to my content are denied, even if I am only asking for a sub and have agreed to pay my own expenses, because there isn't even enough money to pay for subs, let alone any funding for professional*

---

[2] The rating for this option was 2.7, where "1" was the highest possible response and "6" was the lowest.

development that is actually worthwhile."

Some teachers already receive sufficient professional learning. On the post-focus group questionnaire, about a quarter of respondents (22%, n=176) indicated that their district provides the high quality professional learning they need. This finding was echoed by some teachers in the qualitative data from the open-ended responses on the questionnaire.

3. **Access to Programs and Materials**
Teachers have a diverse set of needs for programs and materials. In several of the focus groups as well as in the open-ended responses to the questionnaire, teachers indicated they lacked a range of necessary resources. Reported needs were quite diverse—requests ranged from pencils and paper to tools to implement evidence-based practices and the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. Teachers noted the following:

- *I believe teachers need resources to teach the new Common Core [State] Standards.*
- *I think there should be more funding for math recovery programs.*
- *After school programs and tutoring.*
- *The basics—pencils, paper etc.*
- *I don't have access to the everyday essentials for students to use.*
- *We need resources to use in our classrooms especially moving into a more evidence- based system.*

Some teachers reported that funds they believed should have been allocated to classroom resources had been diverted to other things. However, teacher respondents did not indicate what these "other things" included.

Teachers spend their own money on classroom materials. Question 3 of the post-focus group questionnaire asked teachers how funding impacted their classroom over the past three years. Close to two-thirds of respondents (64%, n=173) indicated that have to buy many of the instructional resources they use in their classrooms with their own money.

Qualitative data from the open-ended responses on the questionnaire also suggests that many teachers have to buy resources for their classrooms. One teacher noted: *"This is a sad, but true fact for most all teachers."*

Another teacher commented: *"My accountant actually laughs at me every year because of how much I spend [on my classroom]."*

Some teachers have the resources they need. A few teachers indicated that they have the resources that they need but choose to buy additional resources for their classrooms anyway. One teacher stated: "*I have and do buy instructional resources but my principal and the district have supplied the resources I have needed. I really don't feel the lack of resources has negatively impacted my students' progress*"

4. **Technology**
Data are inconsistent about the importance of funding technology. Respondents to the questionnaire ranked increasing student access to the Internet as the least important place to invest additional education funds.[3] In their qualitative comments, however, **many respondents indicated that they needed current and reliable technology and digital resources for their classrooms to help them**

---

[3] The rating for this option was 5.2 where "1" was the highest possible response and "6" was the lowest.

implement curricula effectively. A teacher explained: *"Teachers need access to websites that cost money for subscriptions to access some great lesson ideas and material."*

Some teachers viewed technology as necessary for college and career readiness. Some teachers mentioned the disconnect between the technology resources they had on hand, which were described as old and out-of-date, and what they are supposed to be preparing students for in the future such as "21st Century Skills" and "College and Career Readiness." One teacher stated: *"To teach 21st Century skills, we need 21st Century tools." Another teacher explained, "We are technology poor and trying to make our kids College and Career Ready."*

5. Classroom Capacity

Teachers want lower student-to-teacher ratios. In several of the "Post-Meeting After Action Reports" as well as in many of the open-ended questionnaire responses, teachers reported the need for funds to be directed towards helping to improve the student-to-teacher ratio in their classrooms. A teacher explained: *"Teachers want more teachers in the classroom, especially in high-poverty inner-city schools where kids have a lot of gaps and behavior problems." Another teacher noted, "[We need] more intervention teachers in classrooms with students [who have special needs]."*

Teachers want more highly qualified teachers in their schools. Teachers were specific about the type of teachers that their schools should be hiring: highly qualified teachers. One teacher commented, *"I think our students would greatly benefit from reduced student to teacher ratios; hire more quality classroom instructional assistants, teachers, extended school services."*
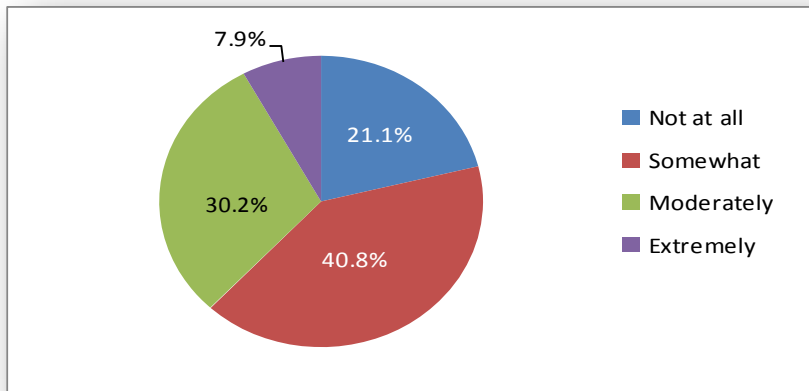
6. Teacher Voice in Decision-Making

A few teachers mentioned that they would like more of a voice when decisions about funding allocations were made at the school, district, or state levels. A teacher said: *"state education funds need to be determined by people serving in education."*
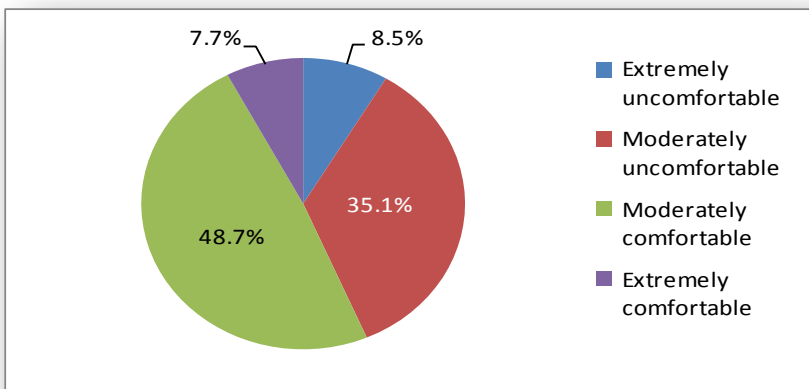
Data Report for Questions on SGG (survey results)

QUESTION: "How much training have you received about SGG?"

Pie chart:
- No training: 49.6%
- At least one training: 36.9%
- More than one training: 13.5%
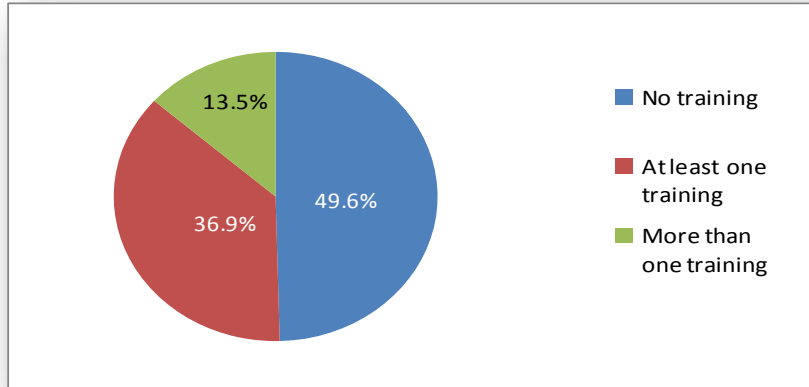
QUESTION: "How familiar are you with setting SGG within the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System?"

Pie chart:
- Not at all: 21.1%
- Somewhat: 40.8%
- Moderately: 30.2%
- Extremely: 7.9%

QUESTION: "How comfortable are you in establishing SGG for your students?"

Pie chart:
- Extremely uncomfortable: 8.5%
- Moderately uncomfortable: 35.1%
- Moderately comfortable: 48.7%
- Extremely comfortable: 7.7%

QUESTION: "When setting SGG, how important do you feel it is that all teachers across the state have similar and comparable goals for students?"

Pie chart legend:
- Not at all — 21.1%
- Somewhat — 40.8%
- Moderately — 30.2%
- Extremely — 7.9%
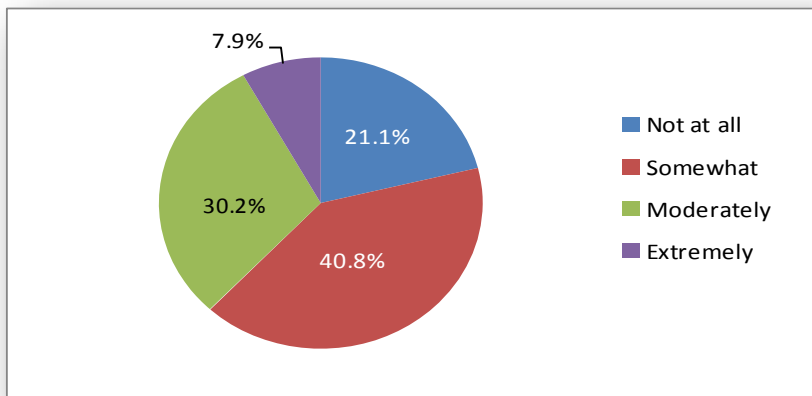
QUESTION: What resources would help you feel more comfortable in creating SGG in your grade and/or subject area (select all that apply)?
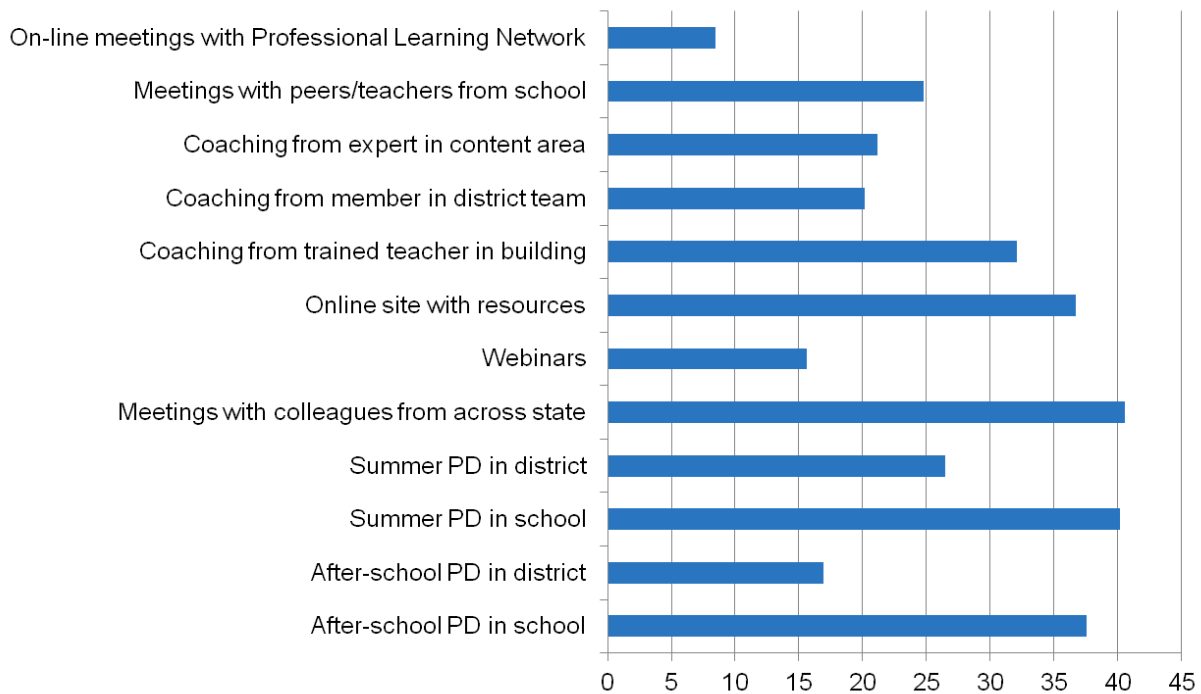
Data Report for SGG (focus groups)

In addition to the surveys administered to teachers in PLN, focus groups were also held across the state. Focus groups were held to engage teachers more deeply on the two topics covered in the surveys, SGG and funding state public education. The qualitative data reported in this section were taken from three sources:

1. A short questionnaire distributed to focus group participants after participating in a focus group;
2. Documents with structured notes filled out by STFs after a focus group had concluded; and
3. Discussions on the virtual engagement platform (VEP) that contained four open-ended questions for teachers.

Table 4: Data Sources and Response Rates

Data Source	Respondent	Data Description	Number of Respondents
Focus group Questionnaire	Focus group participants	Multiple choice questions, open-ended questions	181/224 Response rate: 81%
STF "Post-Focus Group After Action Reports"	STFs	Structured notes on focus groups	12/20 Response rate: 60%
Virtual Engagement Platform	All KY teachers	Open-ended questions	Response rate: 0%[4]

The analysis of these data involved both deductive and inductive approaches which adhere to the highest standards of data analysis.[5] HSG secured the services of Research for Action (RFA), a Philadelphia-based research company, to analyze the qualitative data collected during the data collection II.

RFA created draft research questions after a careful review of: HSG background documents (including current and past data collection instruments, both qualitative and quantitative), the report HSG provided to KDE in January, and past entries on the VEP. The resulting research questions below guided the analysis and organization of the findings.

SGG
1. How comfortable do teachers feel implementing the Kentucky PGES SGG?
2. Do teachers feel they have received adequate training around the PGES SGG? What additional training would they like to receive?

Education Funding
1. How do issues pertaining education funding impact teachers with regard to:
    a. The quality of curriculum materials
    b. The availability, frequency, and quality of training/professional learning
    c. Classroom instruction
2. What steps do teachers take to address funding gaps in their schools?

Based on an initial analysis of all the above sources of information—HSG background materials, conversations, and draft research questions—RFA developed a preliminary set of deductive codes in both areas, labeled: SGG and EF (SGG for data related to SGG and EF for data related to education funding).

RFA researchers employed an inductive approach to data analysis, which helped to both expand and refine the list of codes. The first task was to conduct a comprehensive read-through of all available qualitative data. Researchers used an iterative process to review data, which involved creating and

---

[4] The lack of participation of teachers on the VEP represents a missed opportunity to collect open-ended qualitative data about teachers' reactions to state policy on the two identified areas of interest. It also impacts the ability to triangulate the qualitative data collected at the focus groups. See "Next Steps" section for information about how HSG plans to address this matter.

[5] Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

refining codes throughout the review. The final list of codes is provided in *Table 5*.

Table 5: Codes and Definitions

Code	Definition
SG: PD Goals	Description of existing or desired professional learning around the setting of goals as part of the Kentucky PGES. Includes seeing examples of other teachers' SGG.
SG: Collaboration	Description of the importance of and/or need for collaboration with teacher peers or administrators around SGG in the PGES.
SG: Concerns	Expressed concerns with the overall SGG component of the PGES. Includes statements about comfort level with goal setting. Also includes open questions about how the SGG policy will be implemented by KDE.
EF: Access: Programs	Description of the need for access to instructional and curriculum resources, including physical resources such as books, school supplies, etc.
EF: Access: Tech	Description of the need for access to instructional and curriculum resources, specifically technology hardware, software, and digital resources.
EF: Access: PD	Description of the need for access to instructional and curriculum resources, specifically professional learning.
EF: Money: Salary	Description of the effect of low levels of resources on teachers' salaries.
EF: Money: Retire	Description of the effect of low levels of resources on teachers' retirement accounts.
EF: Money: Capacity	Description of the effect of low levels of resources on schools' hiring practices and classroom capacity (including student-to-teacher ratios).
EF: Other	Other descriptions of the impact of education funding on teachers and teaching.

Since both sources of qualitative data—the "Focus Group After Action Reports" and the focus group questionnaires—pertained to the same activity (i.e., the STF focus groups), all responses were coded using the same code list. The Atlas.ti qualitative software program was used to code and create output sheets for specific codes.

Coding was conducted by two qualitative researchers at RFA, which helped to ensure common understandings around code definitions. Coding was systematically reviewed to ensure inter-rater reliability. Once all data had been coded, output reports were pulled for specific groups of codes and findings were drawn from observed trends in responses.

The post-focus group questionnaire contained six questions—four multiple choice questions with comment boxes provided for additional explanation of choices, one ranking question with no comment box provided, and one qualitative-only open-ended response question. Although HSG is primarily interested in the *qualitative* findings from focus groups in data collection II, the multiple choice questions

and ranking question yielded some *quantitative* findings. Accordingly, quantitative findings from these questions have been incorporated in this report, using qualitative data excerpts to provide additional context.

The qualitative findings related to the SGG are divided into two sections. The first section details teachers' concerns about the implementation of the SGG. The second section addresses teachers' reported needs for collaboration and training.

Concerns About Implementation

Although a handful of teacher respondents said they felt comfortable implementing the SGG, **the overwhelming response from teachers was one of concern about how the policy would be implemented in their schools and districts**. Responses generally fit into one of four categories of concerns:

1. *Mechanics:* <u>There were certain aspects of the policy that confused teachers,</u> including allowable outcome measures, the local vs. state contribution, alignment to existing goal setting efforts in individual districts, and the application of goals to specific student subgroups. The following excerpts illustrate teachers' concerns about the mechanics of the policy's implementation:
   - *I am confused about the difference between the state contribution and the local contribution.*
   - *Weighting within PGES-are the multiple measures weighted at all? Equal significance?*
   - *For math, is K-PREP the only available metric on which to base Growth goals? Or is [one on] formative assessments, proficiencies, etc. available?*
   - *Individual SGG vs. team grade goal – which one is better to use?*
   - *Transient students - who will "get" their scores for growth? What will the rules about these kids look like?*
   - *What about [special education] students – will their measurements be the same?*

2. *Rigor:* <u>Teachers had questions about how to set goals that were high</u> (but not too lofty as to be unrealistic) and consistent across their districts. Teachers posed the following questions:
   - *What is a realistic goal that is still challenging? How low will teacher's goals be allowed to be?*
   - *How can we assure principals will implement PGES to fidelity and not score high to stay under the radar, [fill out] less paperwork?*
   - *Will time be allowed to create appropriate goals at a district level?*
   - *Will they be rigorous across all districts?*

3. *Consequences:* <u>Teachers wanted greater specificity about how the SGG would be used to determine consequences for themselves and their schools.</u> Also, they were not clear on how SGG could be integrated into their professional growth plans and had concerns about how the SGG might be used to breed competition among their peers. The following teacher quotations are representative of these concerns:

   - *Who will determine what is acceptable growth? How will growth rates be determined for teacher-created SGG?*
   - *What happens if teachers don't meet their goal?*

- *[There is a] lack of understanding in how SGG are used as part of professional growth plan for the individual teacher.*
- *Does the SGG tie into the school's accountability score, or is it only used to guide future PD within the school/district?*
- *Will this become competitive amongst peers?*

4. Reporting: **Teachers did not understand how they and their schools/districts would be required to report both the SGG and the state Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) to relevant stakeholders.**

Teachers asked the following questions:

- *How can we convey this [policy] to students and parents in a way that is understandable?*
- *Understanding SGP-how [do we] convey this to teachers, parents, students?*

Collaboration and Training

Teacher respondents indicated that their ability to set rigorous, achievable goals for their students was dependent upon two things:

1. Opportunities for collaboration during the goal setting process; and
2. Professional learning, which included both formal training and examples of high-quality SGG.

Question 1 on the post-focus group questionnaire asked participants what their greatest need was regarding student goals. A majority of respondents (63%, n=176) indicated that they needed all of the following:

- Professional learning;
- Examples of appropriate/rigorous goals; and
- The opportunity to collaborate around goal setting

These findings were reflected in the qualitative data as well. Below are six findings about the types of collaboration and training opportunities that teachers would like to have.

1. **Teachers view peer collaboration as essential to SGG implementation.**

Teachers felt they could create more meaningful goals for their students if they collaborated with peers, working across grade levels and subject areas, both within their schools and across their districts. One respondent, for example, suggested that lead teachers could work between schools to make sure that departments were collaborating. Another respondent suggested that Professional Learning Communities would be a natural way for teachers to work with their colleagues to develop, share and critique their SGG in a safe, judgment-free space. One teacher noted, "Collaboration is a must! Teachers need time to reflect together."

Respondents also believed that collaboration was the key to breaking down any competitive feelings that the SGG might engender among some teachers. A teacher said, "There should be an option where teams of teachers can create goals. This will promote more collaboration and less competition."

2. **Teachers want to collaborate with administrators, but are wary as well.**

In Question 2 of the post-focus group questionnaire, more than two-thirds of respondents (69%, n=179) **indicated that they would like administrators to collaborate with teachers on professional learning decisions around the SGG performance data.**

In their qualitative comments, however, respondents gave mixed feedback in this area. Some teachers suggested that the SGG could help to positively shape conversations between teachers and administrators around opportunities for student growth. A teacher explained that collaboration "[…] will help both groups trust one another."

Other respondents, however, expressed concern that administrators would "hijack" these conversations and take control away from teachers. These respondents suggested that administrators receive training on how to collaborate with teachers in developing the SGG and monitor teachers' progress toward their goals.

3. **Teachers want explanations about the alignment between SGG and the PGES.**

Teachers said they needed more information about the specific mechanics of the SGG, as well as explicit information about how the SGG fits into the overall PGES policy implementation strategy statewide. These types of overviews, say teachers, will allow them to "truly learn" about what the SGG is and how to use them. As one STF explained in her "Post-Meeting After Action Report," "August is going to come quickly and people are going to wonder where all this [statewide policy] came from.*"*

Another teacher indicated: "There has been little to no training for teachers on how this works with PGES."

4. **Teachers want formal professional learning around goal setting.**

Teachers expressed frustration that they had not received training about how to write goals that were "rigorous and consistent" and "challenging yet attainable." A teacher noted, "[We need] adequate training to make sure teachers know how to develop, implement, and monitor SGG."

Some teachers also believed that administrators themselves did not understand how to create a valid and reliable SGG, which ties into comments above about teacher wariness of the quality of teacher-administrator collaboration efforts. **Accordingly, some teachers suggested that administrators be trained in SGG goal-setting, while others suggested that school and district administrators make a point to prioritize this training above other more traditional forms of professional learning**. A teacher explained, "I believe building administrators could get to this if [the] central office would back off on the PD they expect. We run out of time for our own needs."

5. **Some teachers value the idea of personalized professional learning.**

In the post-focus group questionnaire, **a subset of teacher respondents said that administrators should concentrate on delivering professional learning that was tailored to their individual needs around the SGG to teachers.** Professional learning could be personalized, they suggested, by being specific to their subject area or their grade level, as these distinctions would have implications for SGG goal setting.

In the open-ended questions section to that question (Question 2), these teachers said that they liked the idea of personalized professional learning. One teacher said, "I love the idea of designing professional learning that pinpoints individual personal needs."

And another teacher indicated, "[I value] trying to use the SGG data to decide what, in general, we may need help with as a staff. This is more time and cost effective with a limited budget."

6. **Teachers want examples of high quality, rigorous goals.**

Teachers were hopeful that the state, in collaboration with context experts, would provide examples of high-quality, attainable, and rigorous SGG. They also hoped that the district would incorporate these examples into future professional learning sessions. Exemplary SGG would, teachers said, help to ensure consistency of goals across the state, but it would also help teachers on a much more personal level by guiding their own goal setting processes.

One STF indicated in her "Post-Focus Group After Action Report: "*The state needs to blow to door wide open and flood education with GREAT examples of SGG. Otherwise, the goals written by teachers in collaboration with administrators will leave a lot to be desired.*"

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the data collected by STFs from teachers who participated in the surveys and the focus groups. Additionally, HSG uses research staff have conducted on emerging best practices in school districts and other states to develop complimentary recommendations or expand on recommendations that emerge from the data collected from teachers. Ideally, KDE should use future data collections to "test" the support of teachers for the following recommendations.

1. Setting SGG is part of the pilot for PGES that all school districts will participate in beginning in the fall of 2014 and teachers have questions about how the policy will unfold in their districts from the state—even though there is local latitude in implementation. For example, they want to know how to set appropriate goals, what the consequences of the SGG policy will be, how they can collaborate with their peers throughout the process, and what types of training and professional learning they will receive. Qualitative findings from the spring 2014 HSG focus groups suggest that successful implementation of this policy will require ongoing dialogue with teachers throughout the first year of SGG rollout, therefore, HSG recommends the following:

- KDE use STF year two data collections to monitor the implementation of this policy during the 2014-2015 school year;

- KDE consider using STFs to communicate the details of the state's policy(ies) on SGG with teachers through their PLN and in their schools. HSG can work with KDE officials to determine how best to communicate this information (focus group, VEP, for example);

- KDE provide teachers with information about the professional learning opportunities teachers will have relative to the requirement that they develop SGG;

- HSG prepare a policy brief on SGG at the request of KDE. This brief, similar to the one on Student Perception Surveys, provided in January 2014, can be used by KDE to inform pending decisions relative to SGG development, use in districts and schools, professional learning for teachers on SGG development, and trends in SGG state policy in other states; and

- HSG reach out to state education agency leaders outside of Kentucky who have addressed this issue and ask them to provide consultative services to KDE leadership on the topic of SGG.

2. Teaching under atypical financial constraints remains an ongoing concern among teachers. Teachers feel frustrated by the financial constraints that bound their instructional practice, including insufficient salaries, varied and often poor access to instructional materials, and programs (including technology), and a less qualified and inexperienced teaching workforce. Teacher respondents used the focus groups as a venue to vent these and other frustrations about education funding and its impact on their practice. Given that this concern is multifaceted and not related to any one state policy, HSG recommends:

- Short- and long-term action is taken by KDE to address these valid and seemingly growing concerns, particularly the pervasive issue of varying access to high quality instruction materials across school districts, and possibly among schools in the same district.
- KDE should consider how career ladders might be developed and used to provide teachers with the recognition they deserve for assuming additional roles and how their pay might be increased as an additional source of recognition for the contributions they make to their school and school district.

It is worth noting that the quantitative data indicate a significant number of teachers (67.9%, see page 7) feel the demands placed on them have grown in recent years which logically has increased the frustration conveyed by focus group participants and the general level of stress felt by teachers. Nationally, the stress teachers feel has grown in recent years and can be largely attributed to budget decreases as such decreases are associated with lower teacher morale.[6] Addressing this issue could be key in improving teacher morale and retention, particularly in schools with historically low student performance.

3. Professional learning is a critical need and teachers are anxious to receive high quality professional learning on a myriad of topics, in particular, SGG. Additionally, they would like professional learning to be tailored to their individual needs, for example by being subject-area or grade-level specific. This finding is consistent with the 2012-2013 TELL Survey results which indicated that only 65 percent of Kentucky teachers received differentiated, individualized professional learning.[7] Teachers also identified numerous barriers to the effective delivery of professional learning, chief among them funding constraints and the lack of collaboration between teachers and administrators about areas of need. HSG recommends:

- KDE continue to work with Learning Forward to fully implement the recommendations made in 2012-2013;[8]

---

[6] Stress is related to job satisfaction and has grown in recent years. See Metlife Survey of the American Teacher, 2013. Retrieved at: https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf.

[7] Retrieved at: http://tellkentucky.org/uploads/File/ST13_crossstate_analysis.pdf.

[8] See: http://www.learningforwardvirginia.org/News/pdf/SeizingTheMoment_5-20-13b_FINAL.pdf and http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/lit/Documents/KY%20PD%20Report%204%202012.pdf

- KDE should consider how it can support legislative efforts to expand time for teachers to participate in professional learning that is aligned to the state's standards for professional learning;
- KDE should continue to use STFs and other teacher networks in the state to monitor the extent to which the professional learning delivered to teachers is meeting their needs. In particular, the extent to which the professional learning teachers receive is continuous and job-embedded--two elements of high-quality professional learning;
- KDE should consider how the state's longitudinal database and the data generated from PGES can be used to track the professional learning teachers participate in and use such data to attempt to determine which professional learning opportunities impact student outcomes. Having such data could be key in shaping state, district, and school-based decisions about professional learning options for educators; and
- KDE should also consider how state policy can be used to better ensure that districts provide professional learning that engages teachers in collaborative learning with their colleagues to promote: reflection, analysis, and continuous learning to advance teacher content knowledge and content-specific pedagogy.

4. Teachers want more of a voice in statewide debates around policy. Teachers feel frustration that they do not have agency to change pervasive policy problems. The frustrations that teachers expressed most often center on their inability to influence the allocation of limited funds in education, lack of clarity about policy specifics (including SGG and the PGES), the need for instructional materials, and low salary levels.

This second point in particular highlights the important role that HSG plays in facilitating ongoing feedback mechanisms for Kentucky teachers. The qualitative analysis supports this effort by allowing themes and trends to emerge from the data and further explain teachers' reactions to statewide policy issues. HSG recommends:

- That work already underway to sustain the STF program in Kentucky beyond the 2014-2015 school year be a major focus during year two of the program. HSG will engage with KDE in this effort but will also work closely with other state partners to identify a new "host" for the program as well as funding strategy that supports the program in the long-term with a combination of private and public funds with state-based funders eventually assuming the program's governance, operations, and fiscal components.

- KDE plan in advance to use the data STFs collect and possibly STFs themselves in planning for the 2015 legislative session and advocating for, in particular, policies (including funding) that will improve the overall working conditions for educators in Kentucky with an emphasis on addressing the issues raised in this data collection in regard to professional learning needs, the availability of resources, and improving the quality of human capital.

- KDE consider using the STFs and their access to thousands of teachers in Kentucky to "test" approaches to resolving many of the issues raised in this data collection. Testing potential solutions will help KDE make informed decisions about how solutions will be perceived by teachers and whether or not they are feasible and most importantly, efficient ways to resolve the concerns of teachers.

Next Steps

To date, three current STFs have indicated that they will not continue in their role for the 2014-2015 school year. The open application period to recruit applicants began on April 1, 2014 and will close on April 30, 2014. In addition to looking for replacements for three STFs, HSG is considering the fiscal feasibility of potentially adding an unspecified number of additional STFs for the second year of the program.

No additional data collections are scheduled for this school year. Kentucky STFs will participate in a summer training currently being planned by HSG staff. HSG recently completed work revising certain trainings provided to STFs. In partnership with Purpose, a New York consulting firm, HSG has created a new training workbook for STFs and plans to distribute and use it for the STF summer training.

HSG will receive in interim report from Policy Studies Associates (PSA) in mid-April. PSA was hired by HSG to conduct an external evaluation of the STF program. The final report from PSA will be submitted to HSG in June 2014. HSG plans to use the results of the evaluation to make programmatic changes. HSG will share the results of the evaluation with KDE leadership once the evaluation is complete.

Encouraging teachers to use the VEP remains a priority for HSG. HSG believes that the VEP represents an opportunity to not only collect additional qualitative data, but provides teachers who cannot attend a focus group the opportunity to voice their perspective. HSG is in the process of working with both PSA and another consulting firm, 270 Strategies, to identify ways to drive more activity to the VEP. HSG is also considering the use of a different platform that might provide the same opportunity for teachers to share their points of view but is multi-purpose and therefore, more enticing to use.